



New London County Coordinated Access, Resources, Engagement and Support
an initiative of the **Overdose Action Team of Southeastern Connecticut**

March 11, 2021

Re: Written Testimony on House Bill 5430, An Act Concerning Opioids

Esteemed members of the Public Health Committee:

The New London County Coordinated Access, Resources, Engagement and Support (NLC CARES) and the Overdose Action Team of Southeastern Connecticut (OAT) submit this testimony in strong support for HB 5430. For more than five years organizations and community members New London County have worked together to reduce overdose in our community and to improve health outcomes for people who use drugs and people living with substance use disorder. Our CARES Navigator model was the foundation for HB 5597 in 2021 and we are appreciative of this committee's support and work to advance to reduce overdose efforts across our state.


HB 5430 includes crucial language supporting harm reduction measures and will continue Connecticut's efforts to advance evidence-based interventions to address the overdose epidemic. Importantly, the language in Section 2 to exclude products used by individuals to test substances prior to consumption will decriminalize a vital protective measure people can take to make informed decisions about consumption. Distributing fentanyl test strips to community members is low burden, high yield activity for our team to take and neither our team members nor the community members we serve should face criminal repercussions associated with this public health activity.

Removing the requirement for pharmacists to be certified by the Department of Consumer Protection in order to prescribe naloxone is another important step for our state to take to increase access to this safe and easy to use life-saving medication. Likewise, important provisions are included in Sections 6 and 8 that will result in increased and easier access to treatment for opioid use disorder with methadone. This 'gold-standard' treatment remains challenging to access and maintain, despite strong data demonstrating its effectiveness. Recent COVID-related provisions related to take home dosing created opportunity to study the safety of increased take home dosing; recent studies showed no increased incidence of overdose associated with increased take home dosing. Numerous studies have documented an increased risk of overdose associated with suspension of methadone resulting from barriers individuals face in getting to treatment programs on a daily basis; there is no question that we should do everything possible and allowed by federal regulations to make it easier to access and maintain treatment with methadone.

One note: line 179 of the bill includes the substitution of the “use disorder” for “abuse.” We note that the word “abuse” is used repeatedly in the bill, especially in Section 10. A cornerstone of our work in Southeastern Connecticut has been to address stigma and discrimination against people living with substance use disorder. This is an important health justice activity and has direct impact on the overdose epidemic as people experience shame resulting from stigma and thus are more likely to use in secrecy – increasing their risk of fatal overdose. Using ‘abuse’ with regard to people using substances and living with substance use disorder contributes to the undercurrent of bias and false narratives that overdose is the result of “those individuals doing bad things”. We have a responsibility to strike stigmatizing language from our laws and state agency communications. While the important revisions mentioned in our testimony are considered, we implore the Committee to take steps to remove the word “abuse” from this bill.

Thank you for your time and attention to this proposal which will advance our efforts to address the overdose epidemic. We look forward to supporting this bill through the legislative process and on to passage and implementation.

On behalf of the Overdose Action Team,



Jennifer Muggeo, Co-Chair

Deputy Director, Ledge Light Health District